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ABSTRACT

A study examined the health of school newspapers in the Chicago Public Schools, one of the most troubled school districts in the nation. Surveys were completed by advisers at 70 of the 88 public or private high schools in the city of Chicago, Illinois. Results indicated that (1) almost 1 adviser in 5 reported that the school's principal read the paper before it went to press, or had decided that a particular story or editorial could not run; (2) more than 9 of 10 advisers spent a great deal of time teaching writing; (3) advisers reported that students practiced self-censorship; (4) gender, race, advising experience, and the presence of a journalism degree were not indicators of advisers censoring or allowing censorship; (5) nearly half of all advisers never considered advising the school paper until asked to do it; (6) the staffs produced an average of 6 issues per year; and (7) at more than half of the public schools, students were limited to writing stories and taking photos. Findings suggest that newspapers in the public schools fall short of guidelines proposed by the Freedom Forum: school newspapers should be allowed to exercise their First Amendment rights responsibly; students should receive clear instruction on the rights and responsibilities of free expression; media outlets should provide vigorous moral and material support for advisers and school newspapers; advisers should be well trained; and newspapers should publish at least monthly. (Contains 4 tables, 18 notes, and a 14-item bibliography. The survey instrument is attached.) (Author/RS)

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# A "HEALTH APPRAISAL"
# OF STUDENT NEWSPAPERS IN THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

### A Health Appraisal of Student Newspapers in Chicago Public Schools

The health of school newspapers in the Chicago Public Schools, one of the most troubled school districts in the nation, is examined in this paper. This survey specifically compares the district's adviser responses to questions on First Amendment issues to responses to national surveys. The survey also profiles advisers in the system, half of whom have been advising for five years or less and about three-quarters of whom have minimal journalistic training.

In December 1992, a national journalism publication focused on high school newspapers in the Chicago Public Schools with a story headlined "Saved -- For Now."

Only a timely civic fund-raising drive, the article said, had provided school administrators with the cash to spare extracurricular activities, primarily sports but including newspapers, from elimination.

Despite the momentary good news, however, the story's tone was ominous:

> ... Chicago school papers face an uphill battle in the best of times. In a city rich in journalism history -- home to legendary reporters even now -- the school newspaper is in a pathetic state.
>
> For one thing, many schools have not had a paper at all for literally decades. For another, school papers are often simply the projects of a journalism class students take once -- and then can never take again in their school careers. There is no tradition of joining the paper as a freshman and working on it for four years. At many city schools troubled by gangs, after-school work on a newspaper is simply unimaginable.1

Now, as we approach the fifth school year since this crisis, the question is this: Have Chicago's public school newspapers been rejuvenated?

It's apparent that state-mandated school reform has brought well-intended changes to public schools since the 1992 school newspaper crisis. But the changes have created unexpected problems for some school newspapers.

Lengthening class periods to 50 minutes, for example, eliminated the study halls that many newspaper advisers had used as extra writing, reporting and production time for their staffs. Some principals, made bolder by the Hazelwood decision and now overseen by parent groups called local school councils with power to hire and fire them, decided that newspapers should be purveyors of good publicity. And, finally, longtime newspaper advisers were among more than 2,300 teachers in the system to opt for an early retirement package the district offered in 1993 and 1994.

With these changes have come a climate that appears to tolerate increased restrictions on students' First Amendment rights.

For example:

-- One newspaper adviser tells of a principal, fearing "negative" stories about the school, who has forbidden stories about athletic events that the school's teams have lost, stories about teams with losing records or stories about "sexual issues."

-- Another adviser tells of a new principal who, upon reading a student editorial charging patterns of sexual harassment by (unnamed) male faculty and students, had all copies of the school paper collected again after the newspaper staff had distributed them. In an office showdown, both adviser and principal called lawyers; the paper was redistributed

but the adviser had to run a disclaimer in the next issue about the "offending" editorial.

-- One adviser, on the job for only a year, says he submits his paper to "the censorship board" -- the principal and three faculty members who must give a unanimous OK before the paper can be printed.

Using guidelines proposed in the Freedom Forum's *Death by Cheeseburger*,2 the 1994 report on the state of high school journalism in the United States, this research will examine papers' infrastructure and advisers' views on First Amendment issues, two key elements in their viability.

*Death by Cheeseburger*'s suggestions include:

-- That school papers should be allowed to exercise their First Amendment rights responsibly.

-- That students should receive clear instruction on the rights and responsibilities of free expression in a democratic society.

-- That media outlets should provide vigorous moral and material support for advisers and the papers themselves.

-- That advisers should be well trained, with thorough grounding in journalistic skills.

-- That newspapers should publish at least monthly.

**The questionnaire**

At the heart of this research is a series of questions on prior review, prior restraint and censorship, first asked in a national survey conducted by Dvorak, Lain and Dickson (1994). These questions are being used to test a

hypothesis that First Amendment restraints of all kinds are more common in the troubled Chicago Public School system than elsewhere.

Demographic questions about student newspapers themselves, the papers' equipment and facilities, and advisers' backgrounds were devised by my graduate journalism students for 1992 unpublished research on Chicago Public School system advisers. Response to these questions will allow evaluation of the Chicago system, using the *Death by Cheeseburger* guidelines.

The survey instrument is included with this paper.

**Methodology**

All 114 public and private high schools in the city of Chicago were contacted by telephone between Feb. 22, 1996, and March 22, 1996, using a directory compiled by the university's Urban Journalism Center and cross-checked with publications from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Of the total, 88 schools were found to actually publish school newspapers. From this pool, 69 advisers successfully completed the 54-item questionnaire in phone interviews; a 70th respondent completed a mailed survey because of apparent hearing difficulties.

The overall completion rate, after excluding schools without papers, was 79.5 percent: 70 completed surveys from a population of 88 schools with newspapers. Forty-three respondents were from public schools, 27 from private schools.

A census survey was undertaken in an attempt to gain as complete a data set as possible on the state of high school journalism in the city, instead

of simply a representative sample. No complete set is available, and research indicates none has been done previously.

Surveying all schools, public and private, allows comparison among schools within the city, even though the research question for this paper relates specifically to the health of only the public schools' newspapers.

**Findings: First Amendment issues**

It is clear that many of Chicago's public and private schools have limited students' expression in their newspapers:

-- Citywide, about one adviser in every five reported that the school's principal always reads the paper before it goes to press; the percentage was higher in public schools than in private, but the difference was not statistically significant. Dvorak, Lain and Dickson (1994) reported that 14 percent of principals nationally "always, fairly often, or quite often" read the paper before publication.

-- Citywide, almost one adviser in every five reported at least one instance in which the principal decided that a particular editorial could not run; one in five said the principal had told the adviser a story could not run. The percentage of private school advisers who reported such cases was slightly higher, although not statistically significant, for stories. The percentage of private school advisers who reported principals had pulled an editorial was three times that reported by public school advisers, a statistically significant finding.

-- Citywide, almost two of every five advisers themselves had withheld editorials, and more than one in three had withheld stories. A higher percentage of public school advisers withheld stories, but a higher

percentage of private school advisers withheld editorials. Neither was a statistically significant difference. The overall "yes" responses for both questions are higher than the national percentages reported by Dvorak, Lain and Dickson.

-- Citywide, nearly one in every five advisers reported changing copy substantially and sending it on to the printer without consulting student editors. The percentage of public school advisers who reported taking such action was twice that of private school advisers, but it was not statistically significant. Nationally, however, this practice occurred more frequently, according to Dvorak, Lain and Dickson.

Although responses to six of nine questions showed a higher percentage of principals and advisers at private schools exercised prior review or stopped publication, the differences between public and private schools were not statistically significant. Results are detailed in Table 1.

**Findings: teaching time**

More than nine of every 10 advisers citywide said they spend a "great deal" of time teaching writing, but other subject areas, including reporting, layout and design, photography and graphics, computer skills and the First Amendment, receive considerably less attention, as shown in Table 2.

More than half of advisers citywide said they spend only "some" time teaching about the First Amendment. Only one adviser of every 10 (11.6 percent) citywide reported spending "a great deal" of time on First Amendment issues -- the identical percentage as those who say they spend a great deal of time teaching computer skills. Almost one in three reported spending "not much" time on such issues.

Public school advisers were less likely than private school advisers to spend "a great deal" of time on the First Amendment and more likely to say they spent "not much" time, although these differences were not statistically significant.

**Findings: anecdotal insight**

The advisers surveyed generally said students "never" self-censor. Dvorak, Lain and Dickson (1994) reported similar conclusions in a 1992 study that relied on contact with both advisers and student editors.

But advisers' anecdotal responses seem to give insight into the day-to-day operations of these papers. The four questions on self-censorship asked:

-- Have student reporters held off on doing stories about potentially controversial subjects because they believe you might find them objectionable?

-- Have student editors withheld an editorial from publication because they thought the topic was too controversial?

-- Have student editors withheld a story from publication because they thought the topic was too controversial?

-- Has the paper failed to run important stories because the student editors didn't think they'd be allowed to print them?

A number of public school advisers volunteered comments such as "It wouldn't get to that point" or "I would be able to convince them otherwise before it got to that point." In other words, the question of whether students themselves would halt a story or editorial was moot. Such a piece wouldn't be written to begin with.

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## TABLE 1: FIRST AMENDMENT QUESTIONS

| | National | Chicago | Public schools | Private schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q34A: Advisers read paper before publication** | | | | |
| NEVER | 5.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| FEW/YR | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| FAIRLY OFTEN | 13.0 | 1.4 | 2.3 | 0 |
| QUITE OFTEN | | 2.9 | 4.6 | 0 |
| ALWAYS | 82.0 | 95.7 | 93.0 | 100 |
| **Q34B: Adviser does final edit** | | | | |
| NEVER | * | 11.4 | 9.3 | 14.8 |
| FEW/YR | | 1.4 | 0 | 3.7 |
| FAIRLY OFTEN | | 1.4 | 2.3 | 0 |
| QUITE OFTEN | | 2.9 | 4.6 | 0 |
| ALWAYS | | 80.0 | 79.0 | 81.0 |
| * This question was not part of the national survey. | | | | |
| **Q35: Principal reads before publication** | | | | |
| NEVER | 64 | 72.9 | 69.7 | 77.7 |
| FEW/YR | 22 | 2.9 | 2.3 | 3.7 |
| FAIRLY OFTEN | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| QUITE OFTEN | 14.0 | 2.9 | 4.6 | 0 |
| ALWAYS | | 21.4 | 23.0 | 18.5 |
| **Q36: Principal has stopped editorial from running** | | | | |
| YES | (37) | 17.1 | 16.2 | 18.5 |
| NO | (63)* | 82. | 83.7 | 81.4 |
| * In the national survey compared here, questions 36,37 and 38 were asked as one question Has the principal told the adviser a story or editorial couldn't run, or said that an article would have to be changed before it could run? The national figures listed for these three questions were in response to that question. | | | | |
| **Q37: Principal has stopped story from running** | | | | |
| YES | (37) | 20 | 11.6 | 33.0 |
| NO | (63) | 80 | 88.3 | 66.6 |
| **Q38: Principal has ordered article changed before it could run** | | | | |
| YES | (37) | 24.3 | 18.6 | 33.3 |
| NO | (63) | 75.7 | 81.3 | 66.6 |
| **Q39: Adviser has withheld editorial** | | | | |
| YES | 35 | 38.6 | 34.8 | 44.4 |
| NO | 65 | 58.6 | 62.7 | 51.8 |
| **Q40: Adviser has withheld story** | | | | |
| YES | 30 | 34.3 | 37.2 | 29.6 |
| NO | 70 | 65.7 | 62.7 | 70.3 |
| **Q41: Adviser has changed copy substantially and sent in without telling students** | | | | |
| YES | 29 | 18.6 | 23.2 | 11.1 |
| NO | 71 | 80 | 74.4 | 88.8 |

**TABLE 2: TIME SPENT TEACHING SELECTED SUBJECTS**

| | Great deal | Some | Not much |
|---|---|---|---|
| **WRITING** | **93.0** | **6.9** | **0** |
| public/private % | 92.3/94.1 | 7.6/5.8 | 0 |
| **REPORTING** | **62.8** | **37.2** | **0** |
| public/private % | 57.6/70.5 | 42.3/29.4 | 0 |
| **LAYOUT/DESIGN** | **19.0** | **42.8** | **38.0** |
| public/private % | 23.0/12.5 | 30.7/62.5 | 46.1/25.0 |
| **PHOTOS/GRAPHICS** | **9.7** | **56.0** | **34.1** |
| public/private | 12.0/6.2 | 48.0/68.7 | 40.0/25.0 |
| **COMPUTER SKILLS** | **11.6** | **53.5** | **34.9** |
| public/private % | 3.8/23.5 | 61.5/41.1 | 34.6/35.2 |
| **FIRST AMENDMENT** | **11.6** | **58.1** | **30.2** |
| public/private % | 7.6/17.6 | 61.5/52.9 | 30.7/29.4 |

These comments are strikingly similar to comments by private school advisers, who mention "internal censorship" by the students, being aware of "certain things I know I better not do" or knowing that students hold back "because of the administration, not me." One adviser said simply, "In a Catholic school, obviously there are some things you won't write about."

One public school adviser's comment was most telling: "The kids censor themselves pretty responsibly."

**Findings: who censors?**

There are no easy answers to this question. The easy answers were easily eliminated: Gender, race, advising experience and the presence of a journalism degree or journalism experience were quickly determined not to be statistically significant indicators of advisers censoring or allowing censorship.

For example, about half of the instances of prior review occur at schools where the adviser has a journalism degree, a category that includes about one-quarter of the advisers. The principals at schools with new advisers, defined here as five years' experience or less, account for six of every 10 prior review situations. That is slightly higher than new advisers' share of the entire group (52 percent). Analysis showed no statistical significance to these responses.

Advisers who had never been interested in advising until they were asked to advise make up about half (48.5 percent) of the advising group and account for an average of 60 percent of the responses indicating that prior review and prior restraint have occurred. No statistical significance was found for these responses.

Although Chicago advisers overall appear strong in journalism education and experience (about three advisers of every 10 received an academic degree in journalism, a figure much higher than the 7.8 percent reported nationally by Dvorak in 1992), that picture is colored by the relatively high percentage of private school advisers who have journalism degrees.

In fact, 44 percent of private school advisers have journalism degrees -- more than twice the percentage (18) of public school teachers who have such degrees.

Similarly, more than 30 percent of Chicago advisers have had professional media experience, a figure that compares favorably to the 24 percent Dvorak (1992) found nationally. But again, private school advisers were considerably more likely to have had such experience: 33 percent said they had written professionally, compared to 16 percent of public school teachers.

Only one of five Chicago advisers had worked as a student at a high school or college paper, half as many as Dvorak (1992) reported nationally. About one adviser in five has never worked for either a high school or college publication or for any professional media.

Demographically, the survey shows that 87 percent of advisers citywide are white, compared with the 95 percent reported nationally by Dvorak (1992). But no minority advisers were among the private school advisers interviewed; 18 percent of the advisers in the public schools are African American and 2 percent are Hispanic American.

As for gender, slightly more women than men are advisers (53 percent to 47 percent), and the average age is 43 with eight years' advising experience. Nearly 86 percent of the advisers teach in the English department.

**Advisers: experience**

Although the mean for adviser experience is about eight years, further analysis indicates that the adviser group has become dramatically less experienced in the past five years.

Fifteen of the 70 advisers, more than 20 percent, are in their first year advising. Another 14 percent are in their second year. The median for adviser experience differs dramatically from the mean: It is about four years, with 58 percent of public school advisers and 62 percent of private school advisers having five years' experience or less.

Public school advisers have been teaching an average of about 16 years, while private school advisers have been teaching an average of nearly 13 years.

In addition, the group of advisers who had not considered advising until being asked to do it includes six of every 10 public school teachers but only one in three private school teachers.

Citywide, nearly half of all advisers never considered advising the school paper until asked to do it, a figure that is higher than the 43 percent reported nationally by Dvorak (1992).

**Advisers: problems**

Nearly half of the advisers, regardless of public or private school affiliation, cited "student apathy" and "the quality of students' writing" as their major problems.

More than one in three advisers said they needed more time to work with students, the next most-mentioned problem. Nearly four of 10 public school advisers cited their lack of time, compared with about three of 10 private school advisers, even though more private school advisers have no class time at all for their staffs (44.4 percent of private school advisers, compared with 41.8 public school advisers).

Several public school advisers mentioned anecdotally the problems of finding time for the newspaper when students have no study halls. Some come during their lunch periods, advisers said.

Table 3 shows the rank order of other problems mentioned by advisers. Note that discipline appears to be a problem for very few advisers in either public or private schools, despite the reputation of urban students.

**Findings: budget**

The newspaper's budget is the source of one odd finding: Forty-three advisers, more than six of every 10 advisers responding, don't know how much money they have to spend on their papers.

Advisers explained their lack of budget information in a variety of ways: "They tell me when I'm over budget" or "The school handles it" were common responses.

The average budget, for the 27 advisers who could name a figure, was $3,974. The largest budget reported was $9,000; the smallest was zero, reported by a school that is completely supported by a corporation.

Only one school, a private religious school, supports itself completely from its advertising. Nearly a third of the public schools and half of the private schools don't sell advertising, although only private schools' advisers

**TABLE 3: ADVISERS "MOST PRESSING" PROBLEMS**

| | Overall % | Public % | Private % |
|---|---|---|---|
| WRITING QUALITY | 47.1 | 48.8 | 44.4 |
| APATHY | 47.1 | 46.5 | 48.1 |
| TIME | 34.3 | 37.2 | 29.6 |
| LACK/EQUIPMENT | 27.1 | 27.9 | 25.9 |
| LACK/STORIES | 25.7 | 30.2 | 18.5 |
| STAFF SIZE | 18.6 | 16.2 | 22.2 |
| STDNT COMPTR | 18.6 | 18.6 | 18.5 |
| TCHER COMPTR | 17.1 | 13.9 | 22.2 |
| ADMINISTRATION | 14.3 | 9.3 | 22.2 |
| COST OF PAPER | 10.0 | 9.3 | 11.1 |
| DISCIPLINE | 5.7 | 4.6 | 7.4 |

mentioned that advertising is prohibited. Private school officials don't want students competing with other school fund-raising efforts, several advisers said.

**Findings: newspaper profile**

The staffs produce an average of six issues per year. Two papers, one at a public school and the other at a private school, produce 12 issues annually, the most cited by advisers. One public school produces two issues per year, the least cited.

The papers average about eight pages per issue, with public schools averaging slightly less than that and private schools slightly more. Two public schools and two private schools publish 20 pages per issue, the largest size reported, and eight newspapers, five in public schools and three in private, publish four-page papers.

The average size for a publication's staff is about 20, with private schools averaging slightly more than that and public schools, slightly less. About half of the advisers say their staffs come from a combination of sources: recruits (good students from the advisers' other courses), volunteers and students enrolled in journalism courses. A small number of staffs are made up entirely of enrolled journalism students or recruits (fewer than one paper in 10 for either), and slightly more than one paper in 10 is staffed entirely by volunteers.

More than four of every 10 advisers from both public and private schools reported that their newspapers are produced entirely as extracurricular activities. Half of all schools have a single journalism class available to students; about 20 percent of schools had more than one

journalism course, often newspaper and yearbook. In about one school in 10, journalism courses exist, but production is not linked to the courses.

**Findings: newspaper equipment**

Although about one-quarter of the advisers cited lack of equipment as a major problem, most schools have at least a semblance of the technology needed for production, as seen in Table 4. Computers, desktop publishing software and cameras all are available to at least three out of every four school papers. Just less than three advisers of four reports having a laser printer.

About six advisers in every 10 say they have offices for their staffs, although private schools are more likely to have newspaper offices.

Less than half of the advisers say they have a telephone, a photo scanner or internet access for their staffs (although about half of public school advisers report a scanner, the share in private schools is much lower).

Internet access is available for only about one in every five schools, although advisers noted frequently that access is "coming this year."

**Findings: staff responsibilities**

Students on public school newspaper staffs have the main responsibility for writing stories and taking photos for their papers -- but at more than half of the schools, their jobs end there.

In the public schools, all other duties associated with newspaper production, including assigning stories, editing, layout, desktop computer work and making content and business decisions, are either shared with the adviser or handled by the adviser.

Only one adviser of every three citywide said students were primarily responsible for editing their papers, but in a statistically significant finding,

**TABLE 4: NEWSPAPER HAS THIS EQUIPMENT**

| | Overall % | Public % | Private % |
|---|---|---|---|
| COMPUTERS | 91.4 | 88.3 | 96.2 |
| DESKTOP PUB. SOFTWARE | 78.6 | 72.1 | 88.8 |
| CAMERA | 77.1 | 81.3 | 70.3 |
| LASER PRINTER | 72.9 | 74.4 | 70.3 |
| OFFICE | 60.0 | 53.5 | 70.4 |
| SCANNER | 45.7 | 53.5 | 33.3 |
| PHONE | 41.4 | 41.99 | 40.7 |
| INTERNET ACCESS | 20.0 | 18.6 | 22.2 |

more than half of private school advisers said their students had the main responsibility for editing, but less than one fourth of public school advisers said this.

**Findings: media support**

Chicago advisers report little involvement with professional journalists. Almost nine out of 10 advisers reported no "regular" relationship between the school newspaper and media companies, professional journalism organizations or college journalism professors, and only a single private school adviser reported such a relationship.

And, although 17 percent of advisers reported having received a grant, several of those were recipients of Canon refurbished cameras offered through the Chicago Public Schools early this school year.

Some schools, however, have been significant exceptions.

One school, undergoing the "remediation" process for troubled schools set up under the state's school reform law, had no newspaper last year. But with the help of a community newspaper, students are getting journalism instruction and are working at the paper's plant to produce their publication.

Another public school paper is supported entirely by a large cosmetics firm that also has its own printing facility. Several schools receive money for the paper from Chicago Youth Success Foundation, an organization founded in 1991 to support extracurricular activities. The foundation grants participating schools $10,000 for every $5,000 the school raises. 3

The biggest success story in terms of grants, however, is a public school mentioned favorably in the Freedom Forum's *Death by Cheeseburger*.4

The adviser listed four different grant sources, in addition to her budget from her principal, that support the program.

**Discussion**

With the data now in hand, we return to the original question: How healthy are the Chicago Public Schools' student newspapers?

The answers lie in comparing the survey's findings to guidelines in *Death By Cheeseburger*:

**1) School papers should be allowed to exercise First Amendment rights responsibly.**

By virtually any definition, censorship is occurring in Chicago school newspapers. If one's definition of prior review is a reading by the principal, not just the adviser, it happens. If one's definition of prior restraint is a principal pulling a story, instead of an adviser, it happens. If one's definition of censorship is an adviser suggesting that a story on a topic will not be written, then we know, anecdotally at least, that this also happens.

It is important to note that the responses show only slight differences between public school advisers and their comrades in private schools on First Amendment questions. In other words, no statistically significant differences exist between the two groups, even though private schools, many of them religious in orientation, could be expected to be more restrictive.

Most public high schools in Chicago don't yet have censorship boards like the one a young adviser casually mentioned to me in the course of this research. But students' responsibilities for their newspapers are limited primarily to writing stories and taking pictures. Other responsibilities are either primarily the adviser's responsibility or are shared with the adviser. Students do not "own" these newspapers.

Anecdotal reports from advisers indicate that the students, in fact, often are discouraged from writing "controversial" stories ... even before they begin to pursue them. If they do pursue them, many advisers are willing to pull stories or allow their principals to pull them before they ever see print.

**2) Students should receive clear instruction on the rights and responsibilities of free expression in a democratic society.**

As noted earlier, instruction on First Amendment issues is minimal at most schools: one-third of advisers spend "not much" time teaching about the First Amendment, and public school advisers are more likely to fall into this category.

Application of First Amendment principles to publication of the school newspaper also is often minimal, as the frequency of instances of prior review and prior restraint show.

*Contemporary Education* editor David Alan Gilman says First Amendment instruction is not something that will come naturally to an instructor, even an instructor trained in writing:

> It is amazing how little educators, and language arts teachers among them, know or care about the freedom of speech and freedom of the press that are guaranteed to all of us by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.5

Martinson agrees:

> The newspaper adviser must have the skills necessary to do his/her job. More importantly, however, that person must understand and appreciate the philosophical framework upon which our system of free expression rests. That isn't something one can pick up on the job.6

**3) Media outlets should provide vigorous moral and material support for school newspapers and independent newspapers.**

When extracurricular activities in Chicago Public Schools nearly died in 1992, it was the *Chicago Sun-Times* that spearheaded the fund-raising effort to revive them. A couple blocks away from the *Sun-Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* has a history of support for school-related efforts, including grants awarded to the predecessor of the Urban Journalism Center at this university.

But overall support from media organizations, especially considering that Chicago is media-heavy, does not compare to nationwide efforts. The Freedom Forum's *Death by Cheeseburger* report says that 18 percent of professional newspapers offer financial aid for high school projects, and 30 percent sponsor high school newspapers.7

As this survey has shown, grant support for Chicago high school publications has been minimal -- 17 percent of schools reported receiving grants, even though the definition of a "grant," for purposes of this survey, was stretched to include second-hand cameras. Seven schools, just one for every 10 advisers surveyed, have regular relationships with media companies or organizations.

Although universities offer summer and school-year journalism programs, and organizations, including the Chicago Association of Black Journalists and the Chicago Association of Hispanic Journalists, offer programs for talented young writers, little consistent effort is made to support existing newspapers in the schools.

And little attention is paid to longterm damage done by nullifying the First Amendment rights of so many urban students, many of whom already live amid poverty and crime.

As Eveslage observed:

> When school officials put up serious obstacles and discourage discussion in the student press, they do not stop the educational process; they, instead, teach students that their ideas are the wrong ideas. The silence this encourages will last much longer than high school graduation.8

**4) Newspapers should have well-trained advisers with thorough grounding in journalistic skills.**

The key to this recommendation is "thorough grounding in journalistic skills."

In Chicago's public schools, more than half of the advisers never thought about advising before they were asked to do it, and almost four of five have minimal education in journalism. One adviser of every five in the system has never written for publication anywhere.

Martinson, in what he calls "an open letter to school administrators," pleads:

> Please don't turn a student newspaper over to the English or typing teacher. You wouldn't turn the football team over to a chemistry teacher with no qualifications! The newspaper advisers must have the skills necessary to do his/her job.9

**5) Newspapers should publish at least monthly.**

This is a distant dream for most of these papers, which publish on the average of six times per year.

The question of why papers publish so infrequently was not addressed, but these potential explanations would be reasonable: Advisers have too little time with students to publish more often, it's too expensive, students have too little interest in more frequent publication (that apathy again).

One veteran of 30 years of advising recalled the glory days of Chicago's big public high schools when many were equipped with their own print shops.

The adviser, now at a private school, said his paper then published 30 issues a year -- almost weekly. His former school now sends its work to a commercial printer and publishes two issues and a newsmagazine all year.

**Why do student newspapers matter?**

It is apparent that newspapers in the public schools fall short of the five guidelines addressed here. That begs the "who cares?" question.

The importance of a newspaper to a school's collective self-esteem, and self-esteem is very much emphasized in the Chicago Public Schools these days, cannot be underestimated. For that reason alone, principals should be interested in school newspapers, and not simply for their public relations value.

Journalists, likewise, need these students to learn to give voice to their lives if the next generation of journalists is to be able to tell the city's story.

Academics with a variety of perspectives have recently advocated solid student newspapers. Dvorak, Lain and Dickson (1994) say journalism students receive higher grades in high school and college than their non-journalism peers, post higher ACT scores, earn higher writing scores and, in general, are more involved in school and community activities.

Arnold, in a study of urban school papers, appealed to newspapers' self-interest and focused on the importance of urban publications and their heavily minority readership to the future of the newspaper industry.10

Others say school newspapers -- uncensored school newspapers -- are crucial to students' awareness and understanding of democratic principles.

Martinson observes that public schools generally "have little if any effect on teaching of the democratic creed."11 Merelman,in fact, advanced the

concept of a "hidden curriculum" in high schools: The school and the classroom are basically authoritarian, which prevents effective teaching about democracy.12

Otto says that administrators, through their treatment of the school paper, can give their students exactly the wrong kind of introduction to government and free expression:

> To teach them that their school officials may censor is to teach them that government may censor. It prepares them to expect and accept somebody telling them what they know and what they may say.13

The mere existence of a paper is not enough, Eveslage argues. Instead, the paper must be a vital contributor to the school's ongoing communal discourse: "It is an inappropriate message to student journalists and a disservice to all students if officials consider school publications to be merely public relations vehicles."14

Martinson directly addresses principals' attempts at public relations: "... Too often, school 'public relations' has centered around: a) amateurish attempts at keeping bad news out of the paper; and/or b) efforts at promoting the superficial over the substantive." 15

A good student newspaper reflects students' concerns and students' interests, Stempel says: "School publications should publish things that are meaningful to the students, not things that are meaningful to the teachers or administrators." 16

Eveslage defines a student newspaper this way: "The publication is a barometer of student expression, a sounding board for students, the

conscience of the student body, and an interesting and informative communication tool."17

Censorship not only hurts students in the present; it also helps mold their futures, Martinson says:

> A censored student newspaper suggests to students that they have every right to be cynical. Who can blame them for not voting, for dropping out of the political process and for pursuing instead their own material and parochial interests? 18

**Further research**

After March 25, advisers in the city who had not responded to repeated phone messages were mailed copies of the survey. Results from those surveys are not reported here.

The second phase of this study, also not reported here, focuses on the Chicago suburbs' school newspapers, both public and private. Identical surveys were mailed to 175 high schools in the Chicago suburbs.

Responses from the mail surveys eventually will be used with the phone survey results in our university's outreach to area high schools. They will also provide previously unavailable information about the entire metropolitan area's school newspapers.

In addition, my intent was to analyze this survey data by ZIP code with government demographic reports to test my suspicion that public schools in the poorer sections of the city, particularly the South Side and West Side, which have heavily African American and Hispanic American populations, experience more restraint of First Amendment rights.

The fact that aroused my interest was this: Of eight public schools without newspapers, seven are located in the South Side or West Side.

The fact that aroused my interest was this: Of eight public schools without newspapers, seven are located in the South Side or West Side.

In addition, this study suggests the need for research specifically targeted to principals and their relationships with school newspapers in the city's public schools.

Anecdotal evidence from advisers indicated that the person who truly defines the school and its interpretation of the First Amendment is the principal. Frequently -- this is also anecdotal -- the principal with a publication on a short leash was also a new principal or a principal new to a school. Given the highly political nature of principal appointments in Chicago public schools, which are done by parent-citizen councils, a case study of several new principals and their relationships with student media could be enlightening.

Additional research is also needed into students' views of their papers and their rights. A parallel survey to gather students' responses to some of the same questions their advisers were asked, similar to a survey reported by Dvorak, Lain and Dickson (1994), would improve the information base.

**Footnotes**

1. Fitzgerald, Mark, "Saved -- For Now," *Editor & Publisher,* 125:50 (Dec. 12, 1992), p. 15.

2. *Death by Cheeseburger: High School Journalism in the 1990s and Beyond,* Arlington, Va.: The Freedom Forum, 1994, pp. 147-148.

3. Parsons, Monique, "Six Schools Get Cash Awards for Extras," *Chicago Tribune,* May 28, 1992.

4. *Cheeseburger,* p. 2.

5. Click, William J., Educating for the First Amendment," *Contemporary Education,* 66:2 (Winter 1995), p. 87.

6. Martinson, David L., "An Open Letter to Public School Administrators: Student Newspapers: Do Them Right or Don't Do Them At All," *Quill & Scroll,* 68:3 (February/March 1994) p. 6.

7. *Cheeseburger,* p. 53.

8. Eveslage, Thomas E., "Stifling Student Expression: A Lesson Taught, A Lesson Learned," *Contemporary Education,* 66:2 (Winter 1995), p. 80.

9. Martinson, *Quill & Scroll,* p. 6.

10. Arnold, Mary, "Inner City High Newspapers: An Obituary?" (a paper presented to the Scholastic Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, Mo., August 1993), p. 22.

11. Martinson, *Quill & Scroll,* p. 4.

12. Merelman, Richard M., "Democratic Politics and the Culture of American Education," *American Political Science Review,* 1980, 74:p. 324.

13. Otto, Jean H., "Anatomy of the First Amendment and a Look at Its Interpretation," *Social Education,* 54:6 (October 1990), p. 362.

14. Eveslage, *Contemporary Education,* p. 80.

15. Martinson, David L., "School Public Relations: Do It Right or Don't Do It At All," *Contemporary Education,* 66:2 (Winter 1995), p. 82.

16. Stempel, Guido H. III, "Living the First Amendment," *Contemporary Education,* 66:2 (Winter 1995), p. 97.

**Footnotes**

17. Eveslage, *Contemporary Education,* p. 80.

18. Martinson, *Quill & Scroll,* p. 5.

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## HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPER ADVISER SURVEY

## SPRING 1996

Interview number _____

Q1: School's zip code _____

Q2: Public school _____ private school _____

**We'll start off with some general information:**

Q3: First, what academic department do you work in?

a. English

b. Journalism

c: other _____

Q4: How long have you been teaching? _____

Q5: How long have you been advising the newspaper? _____

Q6: When did you first become interested in teaching journalism or advising the newspaper?

a. in high school

b. in college

c. after you started teaching

d. when your were asked to take over the newspaper

Q7. Do you get a course reduction for advising the paper?

Yes ____ No ____

Q8: Do you get a stipend? Yes ____ No ____

Q9: Now I'd like to ask you some questions about journalism at your school. Is journalism a(n) ....

a. required English class

b. extra-curricular activity

c. English elective

d. non-English elective

Q10: How many journalism courses does your school offer? _____

Q11: How do students become involved with the paper? Are they ...

a. scheduled into the class w/o your input

b. recruited

c. volunteers

d. applicants (they apply and you decide who gets in)

e. combination

Q12: How many students are on your staff this year? _____

Q13: As you know, one of the biggest problems for daily newspapers and network television stations is recruiting staff members who are members of minority groups, especially African American or Hispanic Americans. What's the racial breakdown of your staff?_____

Q14: Is that about the same as the racial breakdown of your school? Yes ____ No ____

Q15: How many times a year is your paper published? _____

Q16: How many years has this paper been publishing? (you can tell by the volume number) _____

Q17: What is the average number of pages per issue? _____

Q18: What is the paper's annual budget?_____

Q19: Does the money for the paper's operating budget come from...

a. activity fees

b. sales/fundraising

c. advertising

d. school budget

e. combination of sources

f. other _____

Q20: Do you sell advertising? Yes ____ No ____

Q21: If not, why not?

Q22: How is your paper printed?

a. in-house photo copy

b. in-house print shop

c. commercially

Q23: How much time do students spend working on the paper each day?

a. a class period (ask how long)

b. part of each class period

c. more than a class period (est. minutes)

d. after school only

Q24: Is this more or less time than you spent five years ago?

more _____ less _____ same _____

Q25: Does your school also publish a newsletter for parents?

Yes ____ No ____

Q26: How often does it come out?

a. weekly

b. monthly

c. every semester

d. other _____

e. don't know

Q27: Who's responsible for putting it together?

a. you (the teacher)

b. the principal

c. another teacher

d. another administrator

e. don't know

Q28: Do students write for the newsletter?

Yes ____ No ____ Don't know _____

Q29: Do you see any conflict between the school newspaper and the school newsletter?

Yes ____ No ____ Explain:

**Now I'll read you a list of equipment and services available for school publications. Please tell me which ones you have for your staff:**

Q30A. computers Yes _____ No _____
Q30B. camera Yes _____ No _____
Q30C. laser printer Yes _____ No _____
Q30D. desktop ub. software Yes _____ No _____
Q30E. newspaper office Yes _____ No _____
Q30F. telephone Yes _____ No _____
Q30G. scanner Yes _____ No _____
Q30H. internet access Yes _____ No _____

**Now I'll read you a list of some common problems for high school newspapers. Please tell me which one is YOUR most pressing problem:**

Q31A. cost of publication
Q31B. the school administration
Q31C. discipline
Q31D. staff apathy
Q31E. lack of student training on computers
Q31F. lack of equipment
Q31G. quality of student writing
Q31H. lack of student stories
Q31I. not enough students for staff
Q31J. lack of training for you on computers
Q31K. not enough class time to work with students
Q31L. other _____
Q31M. combination _____

**Do students have the MAIN responsibility for:**

Q32A. editing stories Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32B. taking photos/do grphics Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32C. doing layout Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32D. writing stories Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32E. doing dtp computer work Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32F. assigning stories Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32G. deciding content Yes _____ No _____ Share _____
Q32H. managing the paper Yes _____ No _____ Share _____

**Now this is the last question with a series of items in it. I'll read you a list of subjects you might cover in class and ask whether you spend a great deal of time on the subject, some time or not much time.**

Q33A: writing great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q33B: reporting great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q33C: layout/design great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q33D: photo/grphcs great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q33E: computer skills great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q33F: First Amendment great deal _____ some _____ not much _____

Q34A: Do you read the contents of the paper before it's published?

Never _____ A few times a year _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____ always _____

Q34B: Do you do the final edit of the paper before it's published?

Never _____ A few times a year _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____ always _____

Q35: Does the principal read the contents of the paper before it's published?

Never _____ A few times a year _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____ always _____

Q36: Has the principal ever told you the paper couldn't run a particular EDITORIAL? Yes ____ No ____

Q37: Has the principal ever told you the paper couldn't run a particular STORY? Yes ____ No ____

Q38: Has the principal ever told you that a story OR editorial would have to be changed before it could run? Yes ____ No ____

Q39: Have you withheld an EDITORIAL from publication or required that it be substantially rewritten because of the subject matter — NOT because of the writing or reporting, but because of the subject?Yes ____ No ____

Q40: Have you withheld a STORY from publication or required that it be substantially rewritten because of the subject matter— NOT because of the writing or reporting, but because of the subject? Yes ____ No ____

Q41: Have you changed copy and sent it to the printer without telling the editor you planned to do so? Yes ____ No ____

Q42: Have student reporters held off on doing stories about potentially controversial subjects because they believe you might find them objectionable?

never _____ once in a while _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

Q43: Have student editors withheld an EDITORIAL from publication because they thought the topic was too controversial?

never _____ a few times _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

Q44: Have student editors withheld a STORY from publication because they thought the topic was too controversial?

never _____ a few times _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

Q45: Has the paper failed to run important stories because the student editors didn't think they'd be allowed to print them?

never _____ a few times _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

Q46: Have student editors withheld a story or editorial from publication because they believed it presented too negative a picture of the school?

never _____ a few times _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

Q47: Have student editors withheld a story or editorial from publication because they believed it presented too negative a picture of the community?

never _____ a few times _____ fairly often _____ quite often _____

**Ok, this is the final section of the survey. Bear with me.**

Q48: As far as journalism education, do you have ....

a. an undergraduate degree in journalism

b. a graduate degree in journalism

c. certification from the Journ Education Association

CJE MJE

d. or have you attended journalism seminars/workshops

e. taken a class or classes

f. on-the-job learning

Q49: Did you work on ...

a. your high school paper

b. your college paper

c. a professional paper

d. other professional publication

e. a NL, yearbook or other publication in h.s.

f. a NL, yearbook or other publication in college.

g. none of the above

Q50: Has your school newspaper had affiliations of any kind with any of the following groups?

a. media companies that regularly send employees such as reporters or anchorpeople to visit your school

b. representatives of professional journalism organizations who work with your school

c. college or university journalism professors who regularly work with your school

d. None

Q51: Has your newspaper ever received a grant from a media company or foundation? Yes ____ No ____

Q52: In what year were you born? _____

Q53: And can you tell me your race?

a. African American

b. Hispanic American

c. Asian American

d. white

e. refused

Q54: GENDER: a. male b. female